

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. PG 74A-31

1. Name of Property

(indicate preferred name)

historic Clarke Tobacco Barn at Willowbrook

other

2. Location

street and number

not for publication

city, town Upper Marlboro

x vicinity

county Prince George's

3. Owner of Property

(give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Mercantile Safe Deposit and Trust Co. (trustee of Seton Belt)

street and number 2 Hopkins Plaza, 3rd Floor

telephone

city, town Baltimore

state MD

zip code

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.

liber

folio

city, town Upper Marlboro

tax map 77B4

tax parcel

tax ID number 0670737

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

Contributing Resource in National Register District

Contributing Resource in Local Historic District

Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register

Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register

Recorded by HABS/HAER

Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT

X Other: Phase IB Archaeological Survey of the Willowbrook Property, Prince George's County, Maryland

6. Classification

Category

district
building(s)
X structure
site
object

Ownership

public
X private
both

Current Function

X agriculture
commerce/trade
defense
domestic
education
funerary
government
health care
industry
landscape
recreation/culture
religion
social
transportation
work in progress
unknown
X vacant/not in use
other:

Resource Count

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	Total

Number of Contributing Resources
previously listed in the Inventory

7. Description

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Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The subject tobacco barn is located in central Prince George's County on a large wooded lot. The remains of Queene Anne Bridge road traverse the property eventually leading to a level place in the terrain where the old growth forest ends and the new growth forest begins. At that point, in the terrain, there is a faint path leading to the barn which is located in a depression between two gently sloping hills.

The barn is in a state of disrepair with two sides collapsed and the others in fair condition.

The barn features a distinctive gable on hip roof configuration, a standing seam metal roof, and variable width vertical plank siding. Two sides of the barn have collapsed – the north side and west gable end, while the remaining structure is partially covered in vines. The barn is approximately 51-feet wide by 67-feet long with the interior portion of the barn that supports the gable roof measuring approximately 24-feet by 40-feet. A pedestrian entrance is located on the east gable end and a wagon entrance is located on the south elevation. The framing members of the barn are mortise and tenon construction and pegged with wooden dowels. Hand-wrought and machine-cut nails were also found in the vertical plank siding. Some of the columns on the east gable end have adze markings, but most of the framing material was cut by circular saw. It is believed that this structure was constructed all at one time because the 24-foot by 40-foot interior portion that supports the gable roof has no nail holes even though the framing could have supported siding. In a brief discussion with Thomas Reinhart, Administrator of Architectural Research at the MHT, he stated that there are documented barns that were constructed with the hipped portion and barns that were gable structures with the shed roofs added later. In order to dry the tobacco leaves, tobacco barns had small sections built into the rafters of the barn roof to so the leaves could hang and dry. The horizontal space between each tier is called a room. The Clarke Tobacco Barn at Willowbrook had tobacco rooms that measured 4-feet, which accommodates the size of the type of tobacco that is cultivated in Maryland (Type 32).

Another interesting feature of this barn is the tilted false plates that are used to support rafters. According to a previously documented MIHP form for the Bowie Tobacco Barn (PG 71A-36) these false plates are a distinctive framing system that was seldom used after 1800 (the MIHP form credits Orlando Rideout via personal communication). The tilted false plate system uses a square or rectangular plate set diagonally into the end of the tie beams. The end of the rafters are fastened to the false plate. This system provides significant structural stability to a roof fully loaded with tobacco. It is this detail of the framing system that suggests that the structure may be as old as circa 1810.

However, the dating of this structure is tenuous at best. The historical research and fabric of the structure support the possibility that the barn dates to ca. 1810. Supporting factors include the Clarke family ownership of the property from the late eighteenth century and their use of the land as a tobacco plantation. In addition, the framing members, consisting of mortise and tenon joints pegged with wooden dowels, and the unique tilted false framing system, all suggest construction of the barn during the early nineteenth century. If the barn was indeed constructed in ca. 1810, it has undergone many repairs and bracing has been added as needed throughout the years, as evidence by saw-cut members and the use of machine-cut nails. Without a question, the longevity of the Clarke Tobacco Barn at Willowbrook is a testament to the soundness of its construction.

8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____

Specific dates circa 1810

Architect/Builder

Construction dates

Evaluation for:

☐ National Register

☐ Maryland Register

☒ not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

The Clarke Tobacco Barn at Willowbrook is a surviving example of the southern Maryland tobacco barn. Tobacco has been the leading crop in Maryland's agricultural history beginning with its settlement. These barns were once numerous on the landscape but due to recent development are quickly disappearing.

While the Clarke Tobacco Barn at Willowbrook is in a deteriorated condition and lacks a degree of integrity, it remains a tangible reminder of the prominence of the agricultural history of Prince George's County and the role tobacco played in shaping that history.

Historical Context

Settlers were lured to the Chesapeake Bay region for a multitude of reasons; religious freedom and economic prosperity were leading factors. After the initial settlement, the economy of Virginia and southern Maryland focused on tobacco cultivation. As the region experienced cycles of boom and bust in the tobacco market, so too did the rise and fall in the price of tobacco correspond with the rate of immigration and settlement expansion.

Prince George's County was the frontier and was considered fertile grounds for tobacco cultivation in 1696 when it was founded. Within the next fifty years, the county became populated with scattered tobacco farms, and market communities to support tobacco trade. Since tobacco cultivation required intensive handling, seventeenth century farmers relied on the indentured servants. However, by the 1700s, as farmers and planters became more numerous and prosperous, they found that the limited number of indentured servants was not sufficient to meet the demand and turned to slavery. By the mid eighteenth century, almost half of the Prince George's County population was slave, and in some areas such as Upper Marlboro, slaves accounted for 60 to 70 percent of the population. By the time of the Revolution, tobacco cultivation supported by slave labor was the backbone of the Prince George's economy.

As large tracts of land became too costly to purchase or unavailable, farmers became tenants on the properties of larger land holders. For tobacco planters, purchasing property did not make economic sense. Tobacco rapidly exhausted the land, and the planters who purchased their laborers could move when their rented acreage become infertile.

There were two major kinds of tobacco present in the Chesapeake colonies; Oronoco and Sweetscented. The Oronoco leaf was bulkier, coarser, had a sharper looking leaf, and was stronger in flavor. The Sweetscented leaf was rounder and had finer fibers and a milder taste that the English preferred. Sweetscented tobacco grew best along the James, York, Rappahannock, and the Potomac Rivers. The Oronoco was grown in the area of the Chesapeake Bay. Since the English regarded Sweetscented tobacco as the best in the world, it brought a better price; however, Oronoco was in high demand throughout the rest of Europe and had a wider market, so it was considered the more profitable plant. (www.tobacco.org/History/colonialtobacco.html).

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Planters and farmers sold their tobacco to merchants or agents at local landings. The Maryland General Assembly wanted to encourage trade, so they directed the establishment of towns. The assembly further directed that no tobacco be exported or goods imported except at these established towns. In 1706 and 1707 the General Assembly directed the establishment of Upper Marlboro, Nottingham, Queen Anne, Mill Town, Piscataway, and Aire (also known as Broad Creek). Upper Marlboro was the first to develop and it lay in the heart of the tobacco country. Its growth was such that by 1721 it was named the county seat. The General Assembly directed the establishment of Bladensburg in 1742 along the banks of the Anacostia as it could easily accommodate large shipping vessels. By the time of the Revolution, Bladensburg was one of the most active tobacco ports in Maryland, exporting more tobacco than any other on the western shore and was second only to Upper Marlboro in population and importance.

The cultivation of tobacco remained a way of life and the center of the Prince George's County economy until the Civil War. The emancipation of slaves led to a labor shortage which resulted in increased production costs. Prince George's County tobacco production never reached antebellum levels again. The 1870 production was approximately one-quarter of the 1860 production. Despite the changes in the labor force and size of the farms, tobacco remained the most important crop in the county until the 1980s (Virta, 1984: 263).

Changes in the agricultural character of Prince George's County began after World War II with the rise of the automobile and suburbia. Increasing numbers of subdivisions, government installations, and major expressways within the metropolitan Washington DC area also contributed to the changing character of the county.

Tobacco Cultivation

Tobacco cultivation begins in the late winter or early spring starting with sowing the seeds. In June the small plants were transferred into the fields and planted in rows. The tobacco is weeded, hoed, and inspected for worms and insects. When the flowers grew, the plants were broken off to encourage fuller and stronger leaves. About September, the plants could grow from four feet to seven feet and were ready to be harvested. Harvesting consisted of cutting the entire plant which was then hung to dry in the barns. Over the winter months, the leaves were stripped from the stalks and tied into what is called hands. The bundles (hands) are packed into large wooden barrel-like hogsheads through a screw type press called prizing. The tobacco was transported from farms to either be stored or sold.

In 1730 Virginia passed the Inspection Acts as a way to insure the quality of the tobacco, as the reputation of colonial tobacco was declining. The Act established public warehouses with official inspectors who were empowered to break open each hogshead and remove or burn any trash and issue tobacco notes to the owner. Maryland became aware that the Virginia tobacco had an economic advantage and in 1747, the General Assembly established a formal system of tobacco inspection and quality control. Thus tobacco marketing moved away from the small local landings and concentrated at the sites of the warehouses. The planters were happy with the assurance of quality control and the towns with the warehouses profited too.

As the warehouse process evolved, the inspector also became an auctioneer for the buyers. Due largely to buyer complaints of the inclusion of foreign material (trash in the hogsheads) tobacco was also sold "unprized" in the "loose-leaf" form. The loose leaf marketing method became firmly established after the Civil War. Although as late as the 1930s, many southern Maryland farmers continued to sell the crop in hogsheads at the Baltimore hogshead market. At the market, hogsheads were examined by Maryland Tobacco Authority state inspectors and sold through a closed bid type of auction sale. Some felt that this method left the crop in good physical condition compared to the handling required in the loose leaf markets. Prince George's County adopted the loose-leaf marketing system in 1938.

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The type of tobacco grown in southern Maryland is referred to as Type 32 that has an even burning character, and low nicotine and tar content. Type 32 is grown exclusively in Maryland because it does well in sandy soil with relatively high humidity. The air-curing process produces a light, thin leaf unlike any other grown. Domestic cigarettes are a blend of tobaccos, while the European cigarette companies prefer the even burning of the Maryland type of tobacco – with some brands consisting of 50 to 60 percent Maryland tobacco.

History of the Willowbrook Property

As detailed in Burkholder et al. (2006) the Willowbrook property was owned by the Daniel Clarke family from the late eighteenth century until the estate was sold for payment of debts in 1874 and 1877 to the Belt and Lee families. The property was joined when a daughter of the Lee family married into the Belt family. The Lee-Belt family retained the property until the death of W. Seton Belt, Jr., who willed much of the estate to the Episcopal Diocese of Washington and the St. Barnabas Church in 1959.

The 1820 census only lists heads of household, and the 1830 census for Prince George's County has been lost. The 1840 census reports Catherine Clarke as the head of the household with three children and thirty eight slaves. It further states that eighteen of these slaves are engaged in agriculture. Daniel Clarke (b. 1838) was listed as the head of the household in the 1860 U.S. Census Bureau with an estate valued at 50,000 dollars and personal property at 35,000 dollars. The agricultural schedule lists Clarke with 600 acres of improved land and 250 acres of unimproved property. Clarke had produced approximately 90,000 pounds of tobacco. The farm land continued to grow tobacco, and even as late as the aerial photography of the area from 1938, the land is still cleared for agricultural purposes. It is only in the last 60 years that the land has been fallow and overgrown with trees in the areas adjacent to the barn.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Burkholder, Bradley, Jennifer Stabler, Amy Burkholder, and Thomas Barrett

2006 *Phase IB Archaeological Survey of the Willowbrook Property, Prince George's County, Maryland*. Greenhorne & O'Mara, Inc., Report prepared for Toll Brothers, Inc., and Atapco Properties, Inc.

Engineering-Science Inc.

1991 *Calvert County Tobacco Culture Survey; Phase II: Oral History and Folklife*. Report prepared for Calvert County Historic District Commission, Prince Frederick, Maryland.

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property _____

Acreage of historical setting _____

Quadrangle name Bristol

Quadrangle scale: _____

Verbal boundary description and justification

See attached.

11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Becky Kermes		
organization	Greenhorne & O'Mara, Inc.	date	01/10/06
street & number	6110 Frost Place	telephone	301-982-2800
city or town	Laurel	state	MD

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to:

Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Department of Planning
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600

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Engineering-Science Inc

1992 *Calvert County Tobacco Culture Survey: Phase III: Oral History and Folklife*. Report prepared for Calvert County Historic District Commission, Prince Frederick, Maryland.

Maryland Historical Trust

2000 *Standards and Guidelines for Architectural and Historical Investigations in Maryland*. Department of Housing and Community Development.

Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission

1992 *Prince George's County Historic Sites and District Plans*. The Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Noble, Allen G.

1984 *Wood, Brick, and Stone: The North American Settlement Landscape, Volume 2: Barns and Farm Structures*. The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, Massachusetts.

Pearl, Susan, Marina King, and Howard S. Berger

1991 *Historic Contexts in Prince George's County*. Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission. Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Phillips, Steven J.

1992 *Old House Dictionary: An Illustrated Guide to American Domestic Architecture 1600 to 1940*. The Preservation Press. Washington, DC.

Virta, Alan

1984 *Prince George's County, A Pictorial History*. The Donning Company, Virginia Beach Virginia.

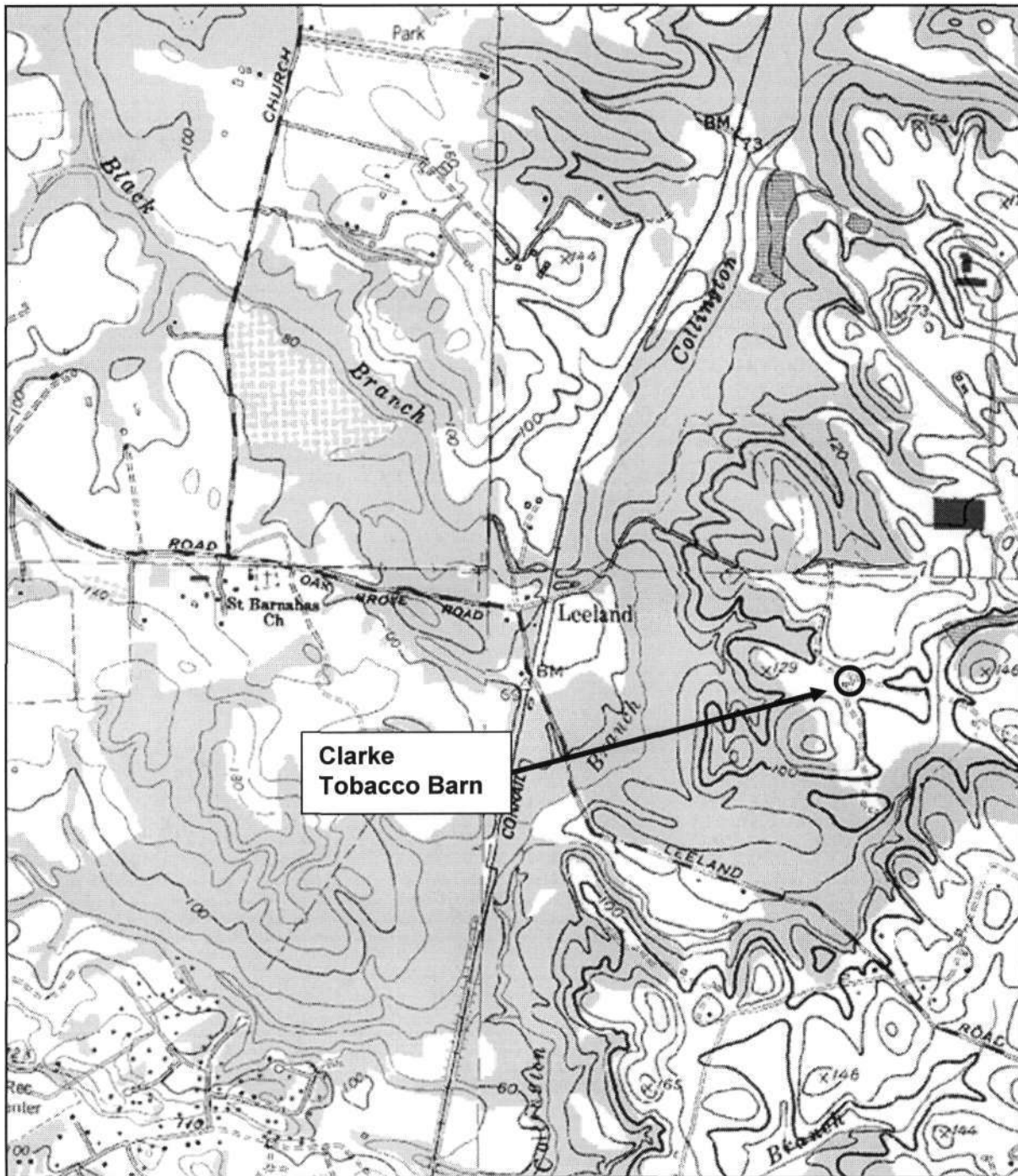
www.tobacco.org/History/colonialtobacco.html

www.pghistory.org/PG/PG300/tobacounty.html

www.pgatlas.com

Various Maryland Inventory of Historic Property Forms

CLARKE TOBACCO BARN AT WILLOWBROOK



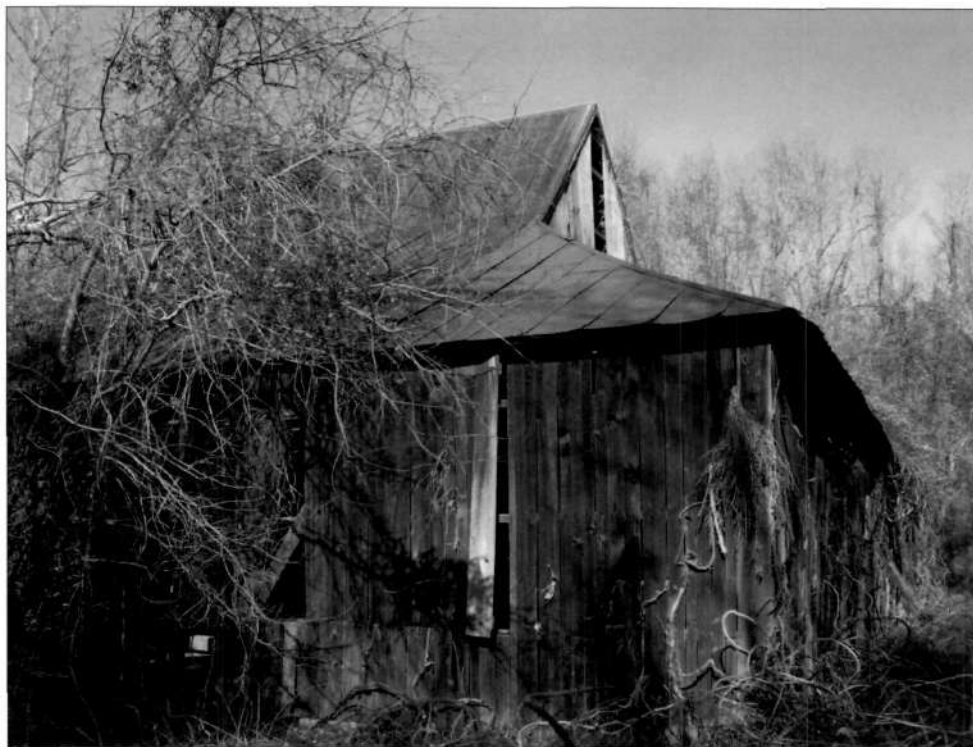
BRISTOL
 Portion of Upper Marlboro 7.5-minute USGS quadrangle with the location of the Clarke Tobacco Barn circled.



View of the east façade – this façade is the most intact.



Alternate view of the east façade.



View of the southeast corner .



View of the southwest corner.



View of the collapsed west gable end.



Alternate view of the west gable end.



View of the north elevation.



View from the eastern gable entry looking straight to the collapsed west gable end.



View of the interior south elevation.



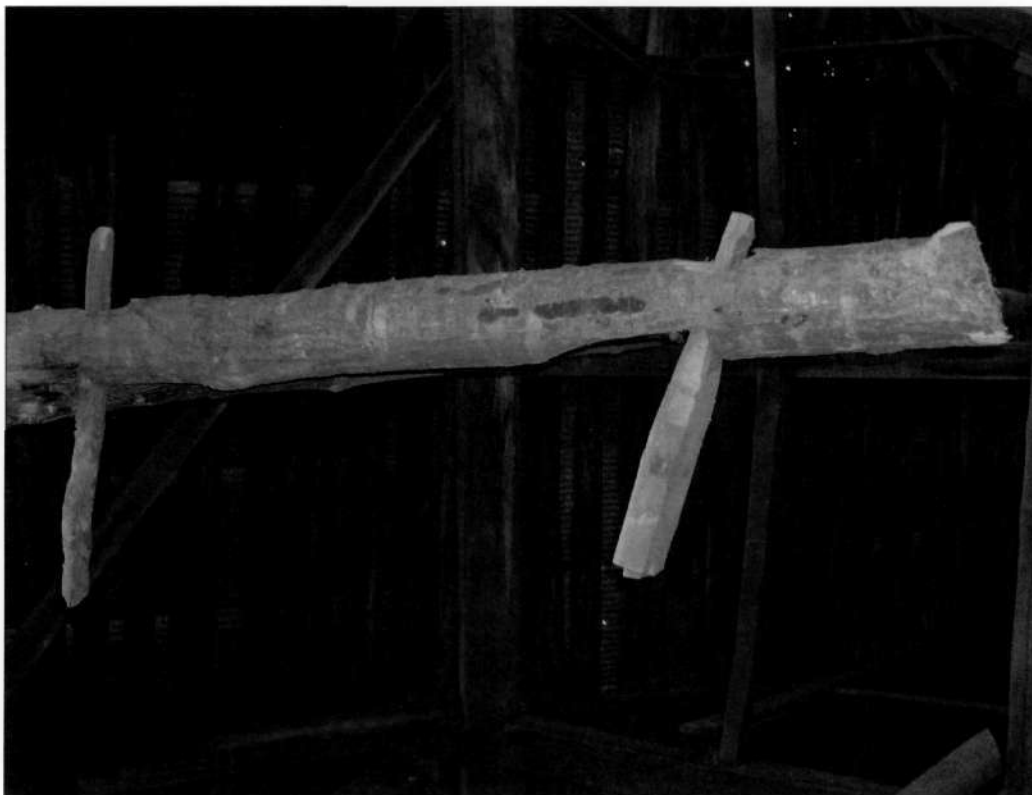
View of the interior of the southwest corner.



Detail of mortise and tenon joint looking up into rafters of the west gable end.



Interior view of the collapsed north wall at the north east corner.



Detail of the tobacco sticks that were used to hang the tobacco leaves to dry.

